

MORE NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE GANDAK-KOSI
WATERSHED, NEPAL¹

BY
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This year we again had the chance of a short holiday on the ridge leading to the Gosainkund Lekh. We chose the first half of May as the weather is usually settled in Nepal at that time of year, and we hoped that the birds would be breeding in the higher hills. As far as the birds were concerned the trip was very successful, but the weather could hardly have been worse. There was a thunder-storm every evening, and above 9,000 ft. a thick mist from about 9 a.m. onwards. The early mornings were usually fine, and the views of course all the more perfect after the rain. We made a small collection of birds and plants, and these have been identified in the Natural History Museum in London. As I am no botanist I have put a query after the names of plants identified only by me, and not in the Museum.

May 5th: With what joy does one leave the valley for a fortnight in the high hills. I know of no greater pleasure. Left Sandarigal at 11 a.m. Hot, but a faint breeze blowing. *Symplocos crataegoides* in flower all along the path, small trees, very like the English hawthorn and with the same strange perfume, the 'deathly' perfume of the poet—

'The flowers of the field have a sweet smell,
Meadowsweet, tansy, thyme and faint-heart pimpernel,
But sweeter even than these
The silver of the May
Wreathed is with incense
For the Judgement day.'

The hum of bees surrounds every tree. Plumbeous Redstarts were feeding young still in the nest. Two and a half hours to the top of the ridge, 8,000 ft. No bird song in these sultry midday hours, except from the Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler which is never silent, and occasional sweet notes from the Whistling Thrushes near the stream. On this ridge the hawthorn-like *Symplocos* does not grow above 7,000 ft. (I have seen it much higher elsewhere) and its place is taken by *S. sumantia*. This flowers in March, and nothing now left but bunches of dried brown stamens. *Quercus lamellosa* (?) that loveliest of the Himalayan oaks, now quite bare of leaves, but the fat lilac-coloured buds lifted against the blue sky. It is only bare of leaves for a very short time. Over the ridge we searched for a camp site in the lovely little valleys full of flowering berberis (*B. aristata* ?) and viburnum (*V. erubescens*). The best sites had

¹ For the first article 'Some Birds seen on the Gandak-Kosi Watershed in March, 1951' see *J.B.N.H.S.*, 50 (2): 355-366 (December, 1951).

no water, and when water was found the land was steep and exposed to the wind. There is much to be said in these steep hills for small bivouac tents and no camp beds. A larger tent could not have been pitched here, but two small shelves were soon found into which bedding rolls fitted very comfortably. A roaring wind was blowing from the west. All the storms seem to come from there. I suppose they start in the hot Trisuli Valley. By 6.30 we had finished supper and all the kit safely stowed under tarpaulins. Soon fell asleep, but awoke boiling hot at 10.30 the wind having dropped. Hastily unlaced the tent and looked out into a magical world flooded with moonlight. Utter peace and stillness, broken only by Richard snoring happily from the other tent.

May 6th: Woke at 5 a.m. to a grey wet dawn. The little owl (*Otus*) calling *phew phew*, a cuckoo cuckooing. A wild call rather reminiscent of a wader, may perhaps have been the Hill Partridge, but I never found out for certain. Scimitar Babblers and Stripe-throated Yuhinas calling softly in the berberis bushes. A pair of stonechats had a nest near by. Breakfast finished, gear packed and away by 8. Walked down the hill in a cold wind and light drizzle, very unusual for the time of year. The grass covered with blue gentians and yellow dandelions. We reached Pati Bhanjyang at 9.30, and sat outside the village while the coolies bargained for food; we were not going to repeat the mistake of last year when we had gone on without them, only to wait for hours on the hills beyond. Nepal Martins were hawking back and forth across the ridge in company with Redrumped Swallows. The latter had nests within the little houses, but I have never discovered where the martins breed; they are great wanderers and are seldom seen in these hills. A cuckoo perched on a bare tree above our heads was uttering the most extraordinary grunting noises. I thought it was perhaps the 'curse' of the Eastern Cuckoo, but it presently began the familiar *ek hud hud hud* of the Himalayan Cuckoo. The first note can only be heard at very close quarters. The call repeated about 27 times a minute. Do most cuckoos perhaps utter a 'curse' occasionally as well as their more usual notes? Drongo Cuckoos were also calling, and the *zee saw* of the hill warbler heard everywhere. *Gaultheria* in flower, and a bush with very beautiful blue flowers and white buds was coming into bloom (*Hamiltonia suaveolens*). *Pieris ovalifolia* had everywhere finished flowering and was covered with young leaves very fresh and green; it is a beautiful tree at all seasons. A kite flew overhead, the only one seen. The climb from Pati Bhanjyang is the most unpleasant in the whole trip, and though we were lucky in having it comparatively cool, it was with relief that, sweating and dusty, we finally reached the village and its terraced fields. The village as dirty as ever, the last of the oaks destroyed, but the little fields very neat, full of maize and potatoes. Tragic though it is to see the forest destroyed, one can not help admiring the loving care and endless labour which these people give to their land. At 7,500 ft. the forest starts again, a sadly thinned forest, but swarming with birds. Here we heard again the hawk-cuckoo, maddening bird, always keeping just out of sight, his identity still a mystery to us. We camped as usual on the flat top of a hill on the Mamche Danda.

Hardly into our beds when a terrific storm burst upon us; drenching rain and a roaring wind. I was afraid the tents would blow away and hung on to the tent pole which showed an unpleasant inclination to jump off the ground. After an hour it died away and I fell asleep to a mere gentle pattering on the canvas.

May 7th: Woke to a glorious day. Every high hill shining with fresh snow. The hawk-cuckoo was the first to call followed by the Indian, Eastern, and Himalayan Cuckoos in that order. The Himalayan is always a very late riser and never calls at night as many of the others do. Greywinged Blackbirds and Verditer Flycatchers singing, and the lovely whistle of the Wedgetailed Green Pigeon rippled up from the hillside below where 5 or 6 of them were perched in the tops of the lopped and tortured oaks. A Himalayan Nuthatch was carrying food into a nest hole about 40 ft. from the ground. The Orangebarred Willow-Warblers, so common here in March, had all moved on. Himalayan Swiftlets were hawking above the camp. *Pieris formosa* had finished flowering but was covered with young red leaves forming patches of vivid colour round the camp. We did not hurry away but let our tents dry in the brilliant sunshine, having decided to do only a very short march to-day. It is a pleasant walk down to Gol Bhanjyang. Upland Pipits calling and a pair of Serpent Eagles soaring overhead. A shrub (a *Symplocos* I think, but not *sumantia* or *crataegoides*) was everywhere in bud. We never found any opened flowers and did not succeed in identifying it. As we climbed the steep hill above the saddle I heard for the first time the sweet high-pitched song of the Bluechat. Dr. Dillon Ripley has found this bird in breeding condition in the Nepal valley. I do not think any of them actually remain to breed in the valley, except perhaps 1 or 2 pairs on top of Sheopuri or Phulchok. We always hear it on passage for a short time in March and early April, but it soon passes on and after that I have only found it on these inner hills and above 8,000 ft. At the top of the hill we entered our rhododendron forest—alas, a sadly changed place from the enchanted world of March last year. The flowers were all over and the forest dark, damp and uninviting. However, as the storm clouds were already hanging over the hills ahead we decided to camp, and pitched the tents in a little green valley. *Quercus semecarpifolia*, *Rhododendron arboreum* and *Pieris ovalifolia* the chief trees, *Berberis* and *Viburnum* both in flower formed the undergrowth and the ground was carpeted with yellow oxalis and strawberries both in flower and fruit. This ridge is a very interesting one, as it forms a bridge between the lower and higher hills. Although the same elevation (8,000) as the Manche Danda and Sheopuri, and though the bird and plant life is on the whole the same as found on these two ridges, there are quite a number of species found here which are never seen on the other two (except of course during winter in the case of the birds). These include the Orangebarred Willow-Warbler, the Orangebreasted Flycatcher, the Redflanked Bush-Robin, *Yuhinia occipitalis*, Darkgrey Bushchat, Blackbrowed Flycatcher-Warbler and Bluechat, plants from the higher hills seen here for the first time were *Prunus cornuta*, *Anemone obtusiloba* (?), and a little trailing white raspberry (*Rubus calycinus*). There were a few yew trees,

but these are also found on Sheopuri though nowhere else round the valley. This is also the last ridge where many of the common birds of the lower hills are found, such as Greenbacked and Redheaded Tits, Longtailed Minivets, Verditer and Greyheaded Flycatchers, and Rufouscollared Yuhinas. Whitethroated Laughing-thrushes and Barwings are also very common here, and so is the quaint little tit, *Sylviparus modestus*. The yellow eyebrow of this last is quite impossible to see in the field. We had an early supper and were in bed by 7 p.m. expecting the usual storm but not much worried by it, as we were sheltered from the wind, and though I was not quite happy about the site of my tent in a little valley, there was a path running beside it which we thought would be sufficient to carry off any rain water. By 7.30 the rain started, this soon changed to hail which pelted down on the tent with a roar which quite drowned the occasional boom of thunder. Last night I had feared the tent might be blown away, tonight I felt it must surely be torn to ribbons. Flashing on my torch I saw a little flood about 2 inches deep flowing gently in through the top end of the tent. Pulling up the ground sheet round my bedding to make a sort of island I wondered for a brief moment if camping really was such a good idea. Luckily the storm died down for a few minutes and I shouted to poor Richard for help. He rushed out minus all clothing and dug trenches furiously. Slowly the water subsided and Richard regained his tent, only just in time for the hail came roaring down again with redoubled violence. By 10 p.m. it had ceased, and peeping out I saw a white world, the hail stones gathered into drifts inches deep and shining like snow in the faint moonlight. Fell asleep only to be woken in the small hours by a peculiar noise just outside the tent. Again I flashed my torch. A large vague shape blundered noisily away. Only a chumry I realised with relief, but though gentle creatures, they are rather large, and the tent very small. I would just as soon they did not walk on us.

May 8th: Woke at 5 to hear the skinner blowing away at the fire and the cuckoo calling. Richard said he had heard the Indian Cuckoo as early as 2 a.m. Blackbirds singing gloriously, and the thin *zee zee* of the Yellowbrowed Tit, and the whirring song of the Orangebarred Willow-Warbler ringing through the wet woods. The morning was clear but we were in shadow from a small hill and everything was soaking wet. We packed as quickly as possible. Two Sherpa boys watching a herd of chumries came and squatted at the side of the camp. They were soon joined by a girl who had come to fetch water. This she carried in a hollowed-out tree branch suspended by a strap across her forehead. She was very talkative and gay with the natural friendliness of all Sherpas in these hills. She was very interested in our bedding and felt the blankets critically, but they were good ones she said. Our coolies had spent the night in her family hut, one of them, rather a good looking youth was far too busy flirting with her to pay any attention to his share of the packing. However, she administered a resounding slap on the side of his face, to the delight of the others, and looking rather foolish he returned to his work. We were away by 8.30, very pleasant walking up the ridge on the springy green grass. Last year it had all been dusty

and dried up, now after the rain it was all fresh and green, the narrow ridge often widening out into enchanting alps. At 9,000 ft. we entered the dark oak forest. Here we heard for the first time the thin trill of the Nepal Tree-creeper, and came upon a pair of the adorable little Yellowbellied Flycatchers, bobbing and pirouetting like the larger fantail flycatchers of the lower hills. From here the Orangebreasted Flycatcher was one of the commonest birds, every little valley or alp holding its pair. They guard their territory jealously. On emerging from the oaks we found the belt of grass, which leads up the hill between the thick rhododendron forest, thickly starred with anemones (*obtusiloba?*) blue and white, also gentians and dandelions and a little white crucifer (*Draba?*). One little dell was absolutely blue with anemones and I was enchanted until I found that it was also swarming with leeches. My enthusiasm greatly damped as I hastened away to drier ground. We had not expected to find them so early in the year and at this height. The unusually heavy rains, I suppose. The rhododendrons, mostly *R. falconeri*, were covered with faded flowers. We were too late for them as we had been too early last year. Up and up the path climbs then winds round the ridge and up a narrow gravel-filled nullah between two hills. This is a good landmark from the south and can be seen from the hills round Kathmandu. It looks very steep but is not so really. Thick mist covered all the higher hills and a cold cold wind blew from the north west, straight from the snows. From the top of the nullah all the ridge to the immediate north is covered with *R. campanulatum*, now in full flower. Nothing this year compares with the beauty of flowering *R. arboreum* last March but *campanulatum* is attractive in flower. The stems grey, varying from silver to almost pink often outlined with black lichen, the leaves rounded at the tip, dark glossy green above, rusty or cream beneath. The flowers mauve, deep purple in bud fading with age. A hillside covered with them has a curiously silver shimmering appearance, perhaps partly from light reflected from the glossy leaves, always now wet from the latest shower. *R. barbatum* was also still in flower and must have a long season as it was in bloom last year in March, when there was no sign of any flowers on other high level rhododendrons. The leguminous shrub *Piptanthes nepalensis* which flowers profusely on Sheopuri in March was a blaze of yellow here now. We decided to camp on our favourite marg with the 4 huts. One of these was soon made comfortable with a thick juniper carpet and the tents tied over the many gaps in roof and walls. Although sheltered from the rain it was now bitterly cold. We put on all our thickest clothes. From midday it rained continuously. In the evening this cleared and a golden sunshine without warmth flooded the world for a few minutes before the sun set. The Gosainkund Lekh as beautiful as ever. After a hot supper we were glad of thick sleeping bags.

May 9th: Woke to a divine morning, but so cold that it was an effort to leave our beds. No cuckoos calling for the first time. The wild song of the Whitecollared Blackbird throbbing in short bursts across the marg. It consists of a few notes or a short phrase repeated usually 4 times then a pause then a fresh phrase again repeated

4 times. This will go on for hours in spite of rain or storms. The song has a magical quality, wild and sweet. It reminds me of the English song thrush in rough spring weather. The graywinged blackbird has a mellow gentle song more like that of the English blackbird. I prefer the thrush, though most English listeners disagree with me, some in fact becoming positively indignant over the matter! The blackbird's song is languid and graceful, the polished product of a court poet, but to me it lacks the magic of the less perfect song, and here particularly the wild notes seem to catch the spirit of the mountains. We stayed 5 nights on this marg. The early hours were always perfect but each day by 10 a.m. the mist had descended and the afternoons were given to rain and storms more or less severe. We were up with the first light and away from camp by 6 a.m. each day. There is so much to explore that a month could profitably be spent here. The bird life very different from that in March last year. The winter migrants have mostly left, though flocks of pipits (both *hodgsoni* and *roseatus*) are common on the marg, and are still on migration I think, presumably for the very high hills, as pairs of both are already established here and breeding. Summer migrants have arrived and are taking up their territories. Rosefinches are abundant, at least 4 species; they are still in flocks, their sweet notes echoing through the forest as they feed in the rhododendrons. Tits are breeding. The Himalayan Cole Tit has a nest in the stone wall of a Sherpa hut. The male (?) sits in a fir tree just above the hut and sings all day endlessly *dir-tee dir-tee dir-tee* his throat and breast puffed out with the effort. The female creeps in and out of the nest hole, quietly and not often. She appears to carry nothing so is apparently incubating. I had intended to collect these tits, but cannot bring myself to shoot them when nesting, a very unscientific attitude I fear!

From this marg a little path leads round the south side of the hills above the Tadi Khola. It has evidently been made by the Sherpas to keep in touch with their various little summer camps. It runs at about 10,400 ft. and does not vary in height more than 100 ft. even when crossing the little valleys. On each ridge is a small camp, usually 2 huts, sometimes 3 or 1 only. At present the walls only, built of stones, for the Sherpas bring the roofs of woven matting with them and use them again and again for each camp. The forest immediately round the camps is usually burnt to give better grazing for the chumries. The Sherpas have not arrived up here yet, though everywhere they are moving up. From the path one looks straight down into the valley of the Tadi Khola and the numerous little tributary valleys. Tiny villages nestle on the flat shelves of land above the river. Cultivation spreads up the sides of the hills above the valleys, sometimes I should think as much as a couple of thousand feet. The valley houses are permanent dwellings with flat wooden roofs of planks kept in place by large stones. One can tell at a glance the difference between Sherpa and Gurkha houses, the latter having the steeply pitched roofs and turned up corners which we see round Kathmandu. Here they are all Sherpas. Above the cultivation comes the zone of lopped *Quercus semecarpifolia* as we have seen it on the way up here, and above this the fir and rhododendron forest. Above

each village at a height of about 9,000 ft. is another little settlement, presumably the half way house for spring and autumn. These also have only temporary roofs and are now mostly in occupation. I imagine that each settlement belongs to one family and that they come up year after year, following the tiny precipitous path which leads down each ridge, although they look almost too steep for chumries. I should like to come up later in the year when they are in residence and learn more of the details of their lives. The only people we meet now are woodcutters and these are always Gurkhas (Tamangs) and they do not live up here but come up for a day or two, collect wood and carry it back to Kathmandu. Their methods of wood cutting are wasteful to a degree. Instead of cutting the tree near the root they cut away at anything up to 12 ft. above the ground, the huge stumps being left to rot. They have very inadequate little axes and will chip away at a tree trunk for hours to get one door or plank and then abandon the rest. The hillsides are strewn with wasted wood, a very sad sight. The people themselves are delightful, sometimes we meet whole villages of them who have come up to get shingles (shaklas) for their roofs. They make a picnic of it, and come down singing and laughing, their hair crowned with rhododendrons, women and children as well as men, looking so healthy and happy in spite of their loads of shaklas.

Warm mists rise from the Tadi Khola and we found plants very much more advanced on this path than on the main ridge. Here the lovely yellow rose (*R. serica*) was already in bloom, the long graceful sprays trailing over the hillsides in loops and arches. Anemones blue and white covered the ground as thick as daisies on a May lawn at home. *Pieris formosa*, a common bush up to 10,500 ft. all in vivid young red leaf. In one enchanting gully, overhung by a huge rock, from which water dripped continuously, was a grove of the most beautiful bird cherry trees (*P. cornuta*) all in young leaf, the flowers not yet open. Under these grew a tiny pale primula (*Androsace geraniifolia*), a tiny deep pink primula (*P. listeri*) and several small crucifers (*Sisymbrium* sp ?). Also thickets of a berberis, not very tall with whorls of prickly holly-like leaves and yellow flowers just opening. Gooral kept springing away from us in small groups and I got a beautiful view of one rushing straight down the ridge over the most uncomfortable ground. We also found a small viburnum with white flowers and deeply-veined leaves, very like the English wayfaring tree (*V. cordifolium*). Here the deciduous rhododendron *R. lepidotum* was just opening tiny green leaves, they are still bare on the main ridge. Many banks covered with *Gaultheria nummularoides* in flower now, the tiny pink and white waxy bells very attractive when examined closely. Chestnutbellied Rock Thrushes were common, each little valley producing its pair. Willow-warblers everywhere. *P. pulcher* abundant and breeding, *P. proregulus* in pairs and keeping to a fixed territory, either a single silver fir or a small group of firs. The other willow-warbler was *P. trochiloides trochiloides*, which was very common from about 10,000 ft. up to 12,000 ft. They were mostly solitary, but 2 specimens obtained were in breeding condition.

May 13th: Even the usual 3 hours of sunshine did not materialise this morning and we set out in a fine rain. Time is running short but the weather not encouraging for the higher hills. Only a short march to Thare Pate but steep in places and I felt sorry for the laden coolies. Above 11,000 ft. *Primula petiolaris* is everywhere in bloom. It has finished flowering in the lower hills, 8,000-9,000 ft. in February, 9,000-10,000 ft. in March and April. The flowers here are rather battered by the storms. Round the Sherpa huts where goats have been tethered grew docks and a purple flower (*Lamium amplexicaule*). A few *Primula denticulata*. Tracks of a panther very clear in the soft path along the ridge at 12,000 ft. Thare Pate looks bleak in the rain and mist, the huts are tumbledown and wet and there is no water near. However we can drink melted snow. There are large rather dirty snow beds on the north slopes, and we set to work with tarpaulins to cover leaks and to spread the juniper over the floor. Incidentally no vi-spring mattress can equal the comfort of a deep bed of juniper, and the perfume from the crushed leaves is the best sleeping draught I know. Most of the huts are on the west of the ridge, we chose one just over on the east side as most of the storms and mist comes from the west. We are soon comfortable, but the coolies are very distressed. They have a long hut with no windows and have lighted an enormous fire so that the heat, smoke and fog inside is all that they can desire, but the water is the trouble. They say it does not matter, but they will not eat tonight as too much trouble to melt snow for cooking rice. We tell them to go back to the last camp and to return in 2 days. They depart to discuss this at length. The rain pours down in torrents. However we sit in our hut with a nice scented juniper fire and watch birds. Rosefinches, golden bush robins, redstarts, orangeheaded bulfinches pipits, all within a few feet of the hut. Exquisite firetailed sunbirds flash in and out of the soaking bushes and a female monal walks into the hut and departs noisily on finding it occupied. Monal swarm here and are very noisy and indignant when disturbed. Presently a cooly arrives to say they have found water, and very good water, but a long way down. They bring it back in tins slung between 2 men. They are delighted. At 5 o'clock the rain suddenly clears, clouds lift, golden sunshine floods everything. Jagged rocks and snow peaks appear unexpectedly all round us. Deep valleys on each side of the ridge full of purple shadow, with shreds and tatters of shining mist scattered across them, little bright islands on a dark dark sea. What thrilling country, but bitterly cold. We go early to bed. Shortage of water makes even a pretence of washing mercifully impossible.

May 14th: Up at 5 a.m. Primrose sky and wonderful view. The great peaks of the Jugal Himal brood over us, further to the east is Gauri Shankar. To the west the purple chasm of the Tadi Khola with the jagged Lekh beyond, black against the sky. As the sun rises it catches each ridge in turn and outlines it in gold against the darkness beyond. I now regret time spent on our gentle marg. This is much more thrilling country. Breakfast over, we start off down the pilgrim trail, which is composed mostly of boulders, and winds down a wild weird country. Nullahs full of boulders, covered with lichen; no water, but I suppose that in the monsoon it rushes

down the hollow under the rocks. Wrens everywhere; also accentors, Firetailed Sunbirds and Nepal Treecreepers. Numbers of the little warbler *Phylloscopus t. trochiloides*; they sing *siper siper siper*. We leave the bare hill-side and go down a narrow gully into forest of silver fir, birch, juniper, rhododendron, the last a new one with brilliant pink flowers. Brilliant grosbeaks in bare birch. Nut-crackers scream and scold. Suddenly something green and crimson ahead of us. Blood pheasants, the first I have ever seen, what wonderful creatures! At the lowest point of the path, 11,300 feet we cross a little bubbling stream the first water we have seen since our far away march. The path winds round the hill-side through bamboo. Suddenly a large flock of tiny birds creeping through this; they look like bearded tits—Fulvousfronted Suthoras. Dick shoots 3. They have curious little monkey-like faces. Now the path climbs again, sometimes through thick forest, sometimes over bare hill-side. Here the forest is quite unspoilt, no burning, cutting or lopping. A leafless viburnum with pale pink scented flowers grew along the path (*V. nervosum*). Alas all too soon the mist comes down again, and the blotting rain. We pass a large cave and a swift darts out like an arrow. We reach a little group of pilgrim huts, the view must be wonderful from here, but we can see nothing. Useless to go on. We return regretfully. Rain, hail and tearing wind for the rest of the day, and this time no break at sunset.

May 16th: A wonderful morning. Dick says that he will have a shot at getting to the top of the pass and starts off at dawn. I know that I can't make the pass and get back in one day, but it is with bitter regret that I look across that great valley to the path curling over the hills so deceptively near in this clear light. Richard started at 6.20 and had finished the traverse and started the real climb by 9.30. He got up to 14,300, when he felt exhausted and sick and so had to return much disappointed. He did not get back till dark. I have never seen him so tired, and very depressed over his failure. It is hard to realise that one is not young any more! He could have done it so easily 6 years ago. However, from the naturalist's point it has been a thrilling day.

A flock of Grandalpas at 13,800 ft. about 45 birds, flying very like starlings he said. Then a single pair by themselves. Thrushes large and powerful, size of a mistle thrush, strong flight, dark olive brown, no spots on the back. A willow-warbler at 13,100, very dark green, no wing bar or eyebrow; choughs also about 13,800 ft. Bush warblers up to 13,500, white-capped redstarts to 14,000. Tits (*rubidiventris*) to 13,000. Pipits higher still, paired and singing, but he could not say of what species. He brought down a tin full of flowers. A lovely deep pink primula on a very short stem growing from 13,000 to 14,000 ft. This was *Primula deuteronana*, peculiar to Nepal, Mr. Ludlow tells me. Then there was a yellow primula like a cowslip with an orange eye, *Primula strumosa*, at 13,000 ft. growing on very steep ground where the snow had just melted. A tiny potentilla, *P. monanthes*, 1 in. high nestling in damp moss above 13,000 ft.; very few of these. *Potentilla peduncularis* from 11,000 to 13,000 ft., *Primula petiolaris* very nearly to 13,000 ft. Juniper scrub up to 13,100 ft. and above this only leafless berberis

and the 2 dwarf rhododendrons. A tiny extraordinary saxifrage-like flower was unfortunately too dried up to be preserved. But most exciting of all was a most beautiful large yellow primrose with fringed petals, an orange eye, and lovely silvery leaves. This was growing at 11,300 ft. under a boulder, so close to a stream that when it was dug up the hole left behind immediately filled with water. This was the most beautiful flower that we found on the whole trip and we took it back to Kathmandu where it survived for a week in damp moss. We did not know that it was a rare plant until I had taken a small piece home for identification. It proved to be *Primula aureata*, and Dr. Fletcher of the Royal Horticultural Gardens at Wisley writes of it as follows, 'This is the first time it has been found in the wild condition. It has been in cultivation for some years but never has it been found in the wild before. We grew it in Edinburgh among a batch of seeds of *Swertia purpurea*. There was one seedling different from the others and the seedling turned out to be not a *Swertia* but this primula. It has never been seen in any herbarium, and no collector, in particular the collectors of the Lloyd Botanic Garden, Darjeeling, from which the seed came, had ever seen the plant.' My day was spent on the Thare Pate ridge. I followed it up to 13,000 ft. It was a divine day, the only wholly fine day of the whole trip. Wonderful to sit in this golden world, basking in the rare sunshine. Large Whiterumped Swifts with forked tails hawked back and forth. Himalayan Swiftlet with them, and once an Alpine Swift cut across with the sound of a whip lash. In the golden air swarms of tiny midge-like creatures hovered. I could see dozens of these swarms like little puffs of smoke. Sometimes one of these swarms would surround me, but though they got into my eyes and landed all over my face and hair they did not appear to bite. A small eagle (hawk eagle ?) soared above, it had a light band in its tail and was barred on the breast. A black drongo unexpectedly flew across the ridge. In this sunshine one could almost see the leaves and flower-buds opening. *Rhododendron lepidotum*, bare till a few days ago, is now a mist of tiny green leaves, and *R. anthopogon* is covered with yellow flowers. The leaves of both of these smell deliciously when crushed, so that one walks through waves of aromatic fragrance, and shoes and skirt smell delightfully for hours afterwards. They cover the hillsides from 13,000 ft. where the juniper ceases. A yellow potentilla with pinnate leaves, *P. peduncularis*, is abundant. The leaves are just opening and give the appearance of fluted velvet from the long silvery hairs which cover them. They are soft to the touch as a horse's chin or the skin of a peach. A little blue gentian, a tiny bunch enclosed in square bracts is *Gentiana capitata*. This was also common on our marg.

Even the berberis is beginning to show a glint of green and roses are appearing everywhere in most unexpected places. *Cassiope fastigiata* is common, sometimes making a thick carpet, but only one or two flowers appearing. Grosbeaks are found up to the limit of the juniper; tiny little bushes are enough for them. Rosefinches also, but not quite so high. Even this one fine day was not allowed

to last and by 3 p.m. the mists were down blotting out the mountains and spreading a clammy dampness over everything.

May 16th: We have only 3 days left and had meant to march back to-day to our rhododendron hill, but could not tear ourselves away. Spent the morning trying to identify the thrush which sings each morning on the ridge behind our camp, but without success. Again and again we stalked him from below (it was always impossible to get above him) but always he flew away while well out of range. It may be an *Oreocincla* but certainly not *dauma* which can be recognised instantly by his peculiar shape. It might be *molissima* or perhaps *dixoni* which I do not know. *Molissima* is common in the Nepal valley in winter, as is *dauma*. A pair of firetailed sunbirds joyously searching for a nesting site; the female carried bits of nesting material but not the male. No last sunset, but a hailstorm rather fiercer than usual.

May 17th: A divine morning after a hard frost. All the wood of the hut rimmed with white. Impossible alas to stretch our time into another day. We leave early. How the summer has advanced since we came up here. Roses everywhere, berberis in young leaf, bird cherries in full bloom, *Rhododendron campanulatum* past its best, and anemones everywhere, thicker than ever before, more of the yellow variety amongst the blue and white. A few white orchids (*Pleione*) coming out. A few weeks later they were abundant and in full bloom we heard from friends. At 9,000 ft. we met parties of Sherpas coming up with their chumries. They told us that they got these chumries from Kuti in Tibet. This is up the Sun Kosi valley and seems a very long way for them to travel. Yaks of course could not live here on the south side of the high hills. They had a number of young calves with them, so I presume that unlike mules chumries can breed. The Sherpas said they did so. I have heard since that only the cow chumries are fertile and that they breed these again with the hill cattle. I should like to know more of the lives of these Sherpas. What a very delightful life they lead. They all look very healthy but seem to suffer from perpetual coughs.

For once there was no storm. In many ways the weather has been kind, and we have never got soaked while moving camp. This is a long day, the last climb from Gol Bhanjyang to Mamehe Danda seems very long. The coolies are tired but cheerful and delighted to be on the way home. Camp in our usual spot, a lovely mellow evening. Birds nesting everywhere, sivas, yuhinas, scimitar babblers, etc.

May 17th: Back to Kathmandu. A very hot walk down to Pate Bhangyang and hotter climb up to Sheopuri. Here a violent storm hits us, floods of rain, hail, thunder. I have foolishly worn my light boots with rubber soles. Impossible to stand up in them on these slippery paths. Am obliged to wait for the coolies and my nailed shoes. I take refuge in a hut. It is dark, full of blinding smoke. Every one as usual very cheerful and they make room for me by the fire. I can only see the ring of faces lit by the fire. Soon I am so badly bitten that I am obliged to go out. Everyone astonished that I should leave before the storm is over. I stand on the verandah and scratch. The rain stops, the sun shines out catch-

ing a million sparkles of light from the drenched forest. Birds sing. My late companions emerge one by one from the dark hut. I had thought the hut might hold 12 people, 28 come out!

The coolies and my shoes arrive. Nothing more now but to climb down the steep path, past Sandarigal the stream now flooded with dark boiling water from the storm. How sad and how sad! But what a perfect fortnight it has been!

BIRDS SEEN ON GANDAK-KOSI WATERSHED DURING FIRST HALF OF
MAY

Nucifraga caryocatactes: Himalayan Nutcracker.

These birds were always in family parties so must breed very early.

Lophophanes rubidiventris: Rufousbellied Crested Tit.

Very common 10,000-12,500 ft. Most were feeding young in the nest.

L. ater aemodius: Himalayan Cole Tit.

Very common from 9,500-11,000 ft. Abundant round our camp at 10,500 ft. Most had nests, but less advanced than last birds, and many still building or incubating.

L. dichrous dichrous: Brown Crested Tit.

Also breeding between 11,000 and 11,500 ft.

Suthora fulvifrons: Fulvous-fronted Suthora.

A party of about 30 birds creeping about in bamboo scrub at 11,300 ft. on the pilgrim trail. They looked very like the English Bearded Tit and kept up a continual thin squeaking. 3 shot had their bills full of crushed bamboo.

Ianthia ocellata: Whitespotted Laughing-thrush.

Common in small parties from 9,500-11,500 ft. It has a most beautiful very human whistle, which might be syllabified *Tu wee, Tu wee, Tu witty O*. I had not seen them last year in March, but as they are very shy and skulk out of sight, they would probably never be noticed when not calling.

Trochalopteron affine: Blackfaced Laughing-thrush.

Common above 9,000 ft. 2 shot varied somewhat in colour, one having more grey on the neck.

Leioptila capistrata: Blackheaded Sibia.

A few up to 11,800 ft. there had been none above 9,000 ft. in March.

Siva strigula: Stripethroated Siva.

Very common up to nearly 12,000 ft. We had not seen any above 9,000 ft. in March. A great variety of notes not heard in winter. Call a loud *Chee-er Chee-er*. Song rather a jumble, some

sweet notes mingled with harsh squeaks and churrs. They were in large parties above 9,000 ft.; below this already paired and nest building.

Yuhina occipitalis : Chestnutnaped Yuhina.

Very common above 9,000 ft. I found a nest at 10,500 ft. on the 10th of May. It was a cup of moss and leaves, built into a large lump of moss which formed a dome over the nest. It was in the fork of a small tree about 3 ft. from the ground, and well concealed as large lumps of moss are found on practically every bush and tree in these damp hills. It was lined with fine roots and contained 2 young perhaps 3 days old, they were sparsely covered with long black down. The parent was very tame and would sit brooding them when we were only a few feet away. It would have been an ideal subject for a bird photographer. The white ring round the bird's eye and dark moustache stripe showed up very clearly.

Certhia discolor : Sikkim Tree-creeper.

Common up to 9,000 ft.

Certhia familiaris mandelli : Nepal Tree-creeper.

This bird takes the place of the last from 10,000 ft. up to 12,500 where it is very common particularly on birch. Sir Norman Kinnear kindly identified it for me.

Troglodytes t. nipalensis : Nepal Wren.

Very common round about 12,000 ft. and not seen below this. In March they had been common at 10,000 ft. They were singing with great vehemence.

Larvivora brunnea : Indian Bluechat.

Common above 8,000 ft. The males were singing continuously and always from the same place. I saw no females so perhaps they were incubating. Frequently sang from some exposed position such as the top branches of a silver fir. In Kashmir I have only heard them sing from dense cover.

Heteroxenicus cruralis : Whitebrowed Shortwing.

A pair frequented the top of a small hill near our camp at 10,500 ft. Both sexes sang, a gentle but merry little warble which might be syllabified *Hey did-dle did-dle the cat an*. This was a sight record only.

Grandala coelicolor : Hodgson's Grandala.

My husband saw a flock of about 45 birds at 13,800 ft. on the pilgrim trail. At first he mistook them for starlings. He also saw one solitary pair.

Tarsiger chrysaeus : Golden Bush-robin.

Very common at 12,000 ft. In pairs and several females appeared very anxious as if they had nests. I found a nest on my last day at Thare Pati. It was not quite completed, built of moss into the roots

of a juniper on a small bank. Only the female was working on it. I had not time to watch for long. They had harsh churring notes. I never heard a song.

Turdus albocinctus : Whitecollared Blackbird.

Common on all the ridges above 8,000 ft. and up to 12,000 ft. and the limit of the trees. The wild sweet song was a characteristic sound through the rain and mist.

Oreocincla ?

A thrush was common at Thare Pati. It had quite a fine song and sang every morning from the top of a small juniper bush or from a rock on the steep bank behind our camp. Through glasses I could just see that it was a dull white below heavily spotted with dark brown, but as it always kept above us against the skyline the colours could never be made out distinctly. It had not the peculiar shape of *dauma*, so was probably *O. mollissima*. Both these birds are common in the Nepal valley in winter, the latter very shy and skulking.

Siphia strophciata : Orangeorgeted Flycatcher.

Almost the commonest bird above 9,000 ft. They were just arriving in March last year, when we saw only one; now every little valley had its pair.

Chelidorhynch hypoxanthum : Yellowbellied Flycatcher.

Common from 9,000-11,000 ft. Paired. Last year in March they had not arrived. I was surprised to find no Sooty or White-browed Blue Flycatchers. Fair numbers pass through the Nepal Valley in April on passage and I had expected to find them breeding here, but did not see one.

Phylloscopus pulcher : Orangebarred Willow-Warbler.

Common from Rhododendron Hill at 8,400 up to 12,000 ft. Abundant at 10,000 where it was breeding. None left on the Mamche Danda where they had been so common in March.

Phylloscopus proregulus chloronotus :

Fairly common at about 10,500 ft. Paired and singing and frequenting silver firs. I did not find a nest.

P. trochiloides trochiloides :

Very common from 10,500 ft. up to the limit of the trees about 12,000 ft. Two shot were in breeding condition. They were singing but not yet paired.

Seicercus burkii : Blackbrowed Flycatcher-warbler.

Extremely common from 10,000-12,000 ft. None had been seen in March. They were all in pairs and the males (?) kept to the upper canopy of the trees and sang loudly. This was answered by other males from other groups of trees. The females (?) crept about in

the undergrowth and answered their mates with the single *chip* note which both sexes use in their winter quarters. The song has a slight resemblance to that of the greyheaded flycatcher-warbler but is quite distinct to any one who knows the latter.

Horeites brunneifrons : Rufouscapped Bush-warbler.

One of the commonest birds from 10,000 ft. up to 13,000 and even higher. It is found in bushes round the open margs, and in the sparse juniper scrub on stony hillsides where no other birds are to be seen except *Anthus roseatus*. It has a loud little song *sip ti ti sip* uttered continuously. This is often followed by extraordinary sound rather like that produced by somebody blowing through a comb. Though it skulks in bushes it is not at all shy and will perch on the top of a bush or rock to utter its song within a few feet of the watcher. I think that nesting had not actually commenced. I found an old nest in a rose bush which probably belonged to this bird, a little domed structure, thickly lined with feathers, still warm and cosy after a winter's rains and snows.

Perissospiza icteroides : Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak.

Rather scarce but small parties seen from 10,500 to 1,200 ft.

P. carneipes : Whitewinged Grosbeak.

Very common from 10,000-12,000 ft. always in flocks. I did not find that this bird replaced the Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak in the higher hills as stated in the Fauna. On the contrary they occupied the same habitat, and the present bird was found at lower elevations than the last.

Mycerobas melanoxanthus : Spottedwing Grosbeak.

My husband thinks he saw this bird at 10,500 ft. A small flock were seen this winter ('52-'53) in Kathmandu and one was shot by Dr. R. L. Fleming, so they probably do breed in these hills.

Carpodacus rhodochrous : Pinkbrowed Rosefinch.

Common from 10,000-12,000 ft. They have a sweet little lilting song very characteristic. This finch is easily confused with *C. pulcherrimus* which may have been present also, but 2 birds shot were identified in the Natural History Museum as of this species.

C. rhodopeplus : Spottedwing Rosefinch.

Very common 10,000-11,000 ft. They feed a great deal on the ground when the female at a distance might be mistaken for a bunting. They have a sweet far-carrying canary-like chirp.

Procarduelis nipalensis : Nepal Dark Rosefinch.

The commonest finch, abundant at 10,500 ft. in large flocks of both sexes, often with mixed parties of tits, etc. Feeding largely in the rhododendrons; the birds often had so much pollen on their heads as to appear as if they had light caps. The call is a rather wailing plaintive double whistle, very characteristic; I heard no song.

At least 2 other species of rosefinches were seen indistinctly, and not identified for certain. No buntings were seen though they had been so common in March.

Delichon nipalensis : Nepal Martin.

Flocks seen at 6,000 ft. No swallows or martins seen above 7,000 ft.

Anthus hodgsoni : Indian Tree-pipit.

Breeding birds were seen in pairs singing and soaring on the inner hills from 9,500-10,500 ft. They seem to occupy a definite zone between the lower hills (8,000-9,000 ft.) where the Upland Pipit is common, and the higher hills above 10,500 ft. where all the birds found by us were *A. roseatus*. Non-breeding birds were common in flocks at 10,500 ft. and I wondered if these were passage migrants for the mountains of Tibet, etc.

A. roseatus : Hodgson's Pipit.

This pipit was the common one from 10,500-13,000 ft. All the little bare rounded hills about 12,000 ft. were occupied by a pair of these birds. My husband saw pipits at 14,000 ft. but could not identify them. I hope to collect some and study all the pipits more attentively another year.

Aethopyga ignicauda : Firetailed Sunbird.

Very common from 11,500-12,500 ft., never seen below this. They were feeding on *Rhododendron campanulatum*. Females very much in the minority, and one female often had 3 or more males vying for her favours. Some already paired were apparently searching for nesting sites, and this was often in juniper bushes. I saw several females collecting cobwebs, but they would carry these from place to place and then abandon them as if the nesting site had not yet been decided, or perhaps this was a sort of courtship display. The male would accompany the female singing joyfully, but I never saw him carry anything. These birds are very local in their distribution. In winter January-February I have seen them only on the Chandragiri Range at a height of 7,000 ft. The males are then in eclipse plumage and are found feeding on a small jungle tree. *Leucosceptrum canum* (?), Dr. Ripley also mentions finding them on this ridge in winter. On March 22nd this year we climbed to the top of Sheopuri, at 8,000 ft. north of the Nepal Valley, and we found the place literally swarming with these birds feeding on *Rhododendron arboreum*. There were often 3 or 4 birds to one tree. The curious thing is that they were confined to a narrow triangle perhaps $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on each side. Although the rhododendron was in flower all over the hills at this time, I never saw these birds anywhere else. The males were now in breeding plumage, the central tail feathers not very long. Two birds were shot and these long feathers were 25 and 32 mm. beyond the rest of the tail. The Nepal Sunbird, very common all over the hills, was never seen in the area occupied by this species, but was found immediately outside this bird's territory. On April 13th we again climbed up Sheopuri to the same place and

these birds had all gone, we did not see one, although the rhododendrons were still in flower, and the Nepal Sunbird had moved in to replace it. Now we met them again at 12,000 ft. and the central tail feathers were very long, (89 mm. beyond the rest of the tail in one we shot) and fluttered behind the bird like the plumes of a miniature paradise flycatcher. I wonder how long they remain at this height. Mr. B. E. Smythies did not mention them when here in September, and they are not birds one could overlook, so presumably they had migrated elsewhere. Where I wonder? I have never seen them in the hills round the valley before January. They are surely the most exquisite birds in the world.

Picus squamatus: Green Woodpecker.

Fairly common about 10,500 ft.

Dryobates darjellensis: Pied Woodpecker.

8,000-10,500 ft., rather scarce.

Cuculus canorus: The Cuckoo.

Extremely common 8,000-13,000 ft. Above 10,000 ft. was not heard till quite late in the day, 11 a.m. onwards. As they usually call with the first light I imagine they roost at lower elevations and range over the high hills during the day. Usually in pairs and they 'cursed' as often as they 'cuckooed'.

C. optatus Himalayan Cuckoo.

Very common from 6,000-8,000 ft.; not much above this.

C. micropterus: Indian Cuckoo.

Very common up to 10,000 ft., and at 12,000 we could sometimes hear its call drifting up from the valleys below. It is the earliest bird to call in the morning, and also sometimes at night.

Hierococcyx sp?

One of the Hawk Cuckoos is extremely common in these hills between 7,000-10,000 ft. I have spent hours stalking it but have failed to get a proper view or a specimen. On the wing it appears very dark. Calls endlessly from just before dawn till late in the evening, occasionally at night.

Surniculus lugubris: Drongo Cuckoo.

Not very common, and not heard above 7,000 ft. There are so many cuckoos in the lower hills 6,000-9,000 ft. that one wonders that there are sufficient fosterers for them.

Micropus pacificus: Whiterumped Swift.

Common on the ridge above Thare Pate 12,000 ft.

Falco tinnunculus: Kestrel.

Seen up to 12,000 ft.

Ictinaëtus malayensis: Black Eagle.

To 9,000 ft.

Spilornis cheela: Serpent Eagle.

To 10,000 ft.; rather higher than I had expected.

Sphenocercus sphenurus: Wedgetailed Green Pigeon.

Common up to 8,000 ft.; not seen higher.

Ithaginis cruentus: Blood Pheasant.

Fairly common on the pilgrim trail beyond Thare Pate between 11,000-12,000 ft. In small parties which seemed to consist of more cocks than hens, unlike the commoner Monal, whose cocks always had a large harem to themselves. They were very tame and would utter a soft *kik kik* as they worked through the bamboo and fir forest. I never saw them in the open where the monal spent most of their time.

Scolopax rusticola: The Woodcock.

At our camp at 10,500 ft., a Woodcock used to appear each evening just before dusk and fly round and round the marg, a circle of about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile, uttering a deep croak and sometimes a shrill squeaking. Once I saw 2 of them together for a short time. The evenings were usually fine, and it was pleasant to watch them against the sunset sky and magnificent panorama of mountains.